DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 090 301 TM 003 586

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TITLE Researchers-To Certify or Not Tc Certify.
PUB DATE Apr 74
NOTE 4p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, Illinois, April, 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Certification; Credentials; *Educational Researchers; *Qualifications; Research Needs; School Systems

ABSTRACT

The author presents a summary of his own view cn the need for certification of research personnel employed by local education agencies and examines the advantages and disadvantages of certifying educational researchers. Certification is considered desirable upon the development of appropriate standards of competency and the establishment of approved programs for training educational researchers. (MLP)

ED 090301
TM 003 586

19.01

"RESEARCHERS - TO CERTIFY OR NOT TO CERTIFY"

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The topic for this presentation must begin with the premise that there is a great need for educational research. Our consideration at this time is directed to research as is needed by local educational agencies or the elementary and secondary schools of our country. What I have to present is a summary of my own views on the subject relating to the certification of research personnel available for employment by l[illegible] school districts.

Certification is fundamentally a protective device. Primarily, it is a form of consumer protection; secondarily, it protects a profession. In simple terms, the purpose of certification is to place a stamp of approval on a person to perform a certain function. In our profession, certification generally signifies that the person holding such has completed at least a minimum amount of preparation, has completed certain experiences and possesses certain competencies needed to perform a particular role for the school district. To be effectual toward its full purpose, certification must rest on an authority base to such an extent that parties vitally affected by the services to be performed will recognize that the basic purpose of protection is being served.

When one views the many kinds of school districts and the great variance in size and nature of their problems, there is reason to believe there is need for research -- and consequently researchers. Educational research in local school districts is usually directly or indirectly related to the instructional program, pupils, professional staff, equipment and/or facilities -- directed towards the improvement of some aspects of the total program. I am sure that

upon taking a look into the operation of the school districts in any of our states, one would find research projects going on. Most of the research and problem study is conducted by the local staff. Most school districts use professional research specialists very infrequently, and then, as a rule, for relatively short periods of time.

When there is need for educational research beyond that which the usual local educational agency has the expertise and/or time to undertake, it is generally done by a member of the educational administration staff of one of the higher education institutions in the state or a private research organization. When problems related to school buildings and sites need study, it is not unusual that such services are offered by some of the better staffed architectural firms.

In summation, we might conclude that:

With this background then, do we certify or do we not.

1. The kinds of research needed by local educational agencies varies greatly and are in a number of areas.
2. Although there is great need for well done research in our school systems, there isn't a need for great numbers to be employed over extended periods of time. That is, most districts likely would not employ a research specialist on a full-time basis.
3. Assurance of competency in researchers employed by school districts is imperative.
4. The establishment of minimum requirements for persons making their research services available to local educational agencies is indeed important.

Then, the question arises as to the practicability of establishing approved programs for preparation of researchers in our higher education institutions, especially, when it is apparent that many of the competencies are developed on the job or are evidenced through performance.

Although it may not appear to be most practical to establish a great number of higher education programs for the preparation of researchers it does seem that those who do perform educational research of one kind or another should meet certain levels of competency to perform the researcher role.

When one considers the possible disadvantages to a school district in requiring certification for researchers, the one most apparent is probably the "hands tied" situation which one encounters from time to time in any certification program. However, this one must consider to be part of the price which must be paid for the protection gained. The freedom of a local educational agency in hiring research personnel would be limited.

Certification of qualified researchers would aid school districts in their staffing functions with the ready identification of a manpower pool of qualified personnel. Recruiters could then look first to the holders of certificates as their initial screening device.

A minimum number of higher educational institutions might well establish programs for the preparation of researchers after standards for such role have been established through a combined effort of the higher education institutions, research practitioners, school administrators, boards of education and state educational agencies. Then, upon endorsement of the preparation institution, certification could be made available.

Although from a practical point of view, universities may not look upon the development of programs for the preparation of researchers with great enthusiasm because of numbers. However, from the point of view of establishing standards and protection of local districts, certification can be deemed only to be desirable.

In summary, then, I contend that to the local education agency, the real advantages outweigh the disadvantages, in that, (1) at least minimum standards of competency will have been met and (2) a pool of certificated research personnel

who had already been "screened" would be readily available. Any problems that might appear as obstacles to the process of certification are surmountable.

Although the practicability of certifying educational researchers may remain a question, the importance of safeguarding local educational agencies and providing a pool of qualified research personnel moves me to deem certification desirable upon the development of appropriate standards of competency, and establishment of approved programs for preparation.